

Tourist Development Council Regular Meeting
Ocala/Marion County Visitor & Convention Bureau
109 W Silver Springs Blvd.
Ocala, FL 34475
Thursday, August 26, 2021
10:00 a.m.

Due to COVID-19 the regularly scheduled meeting for the Tourist Development Council was held both in person and via WebEx.

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Rus Adams, Chairman.

Roll Call

Present:

Victoria Billig, Jeff Bailey, Bill White, Jeff Gold, Jay Musleh, Rus Adams and Jason Reynolds

Staff:

Stacy Swartout (via WebEx), Jessica Heller, Corry Locke, Loretta Shaffer and Sky Wheeler

Guests:

Dana Olesky, Chief Assistant County Attorney, Marion County; Tracy Straub (via WebEx) Assistant County Administrator, Marion County; Isiah Lewis, Downs & St. Germain; Rachael Anglin, Downs & St. Germain; Jay Harvey, Comfort Suites; Brenna Dacks, Visit Florida

Notice of Publication

Notice was published on the County Website on January 2, 2021 and subsequently updated to include WebEx information on August 12, 2021.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Jeff Gold, seconded by Jay Musleh, to adopt the minutes from the July 22, 2021 Tourist Development Council Meeting. The motion was unanimously approved by the board (7-0).

Acknowledgement of Financials – July

A motion was made by Jay Musleh seconded by Victoria Billig, to accept the

Revenue Status Report and Expenditure Status Report for July 2021. The motion was unanimously approved by the board (7-0).

Mr. Rus Adams stated, that there had been a number of members that have shared with him that they would not be available for the September 23, 2021 meeting. Mr. Adams then asked for a verbal commitment from the council on who would not be able to attend. Mr. Jay Musleh stated, that he would be able to attend and Ms. Victoria Billig stated, that she would not be able to attend. Ms. Loretta Shaffer, Director Ocala/Marion County Visitors and Convention Bureau, stated that Ms. Traci Walker wasn't sure if she would be able to attend. Ms. Shaffer inquired as to who in attendance at this meeting would be at the meeting in September, noting that would help confirm that quorum would be achieved. Mr. Adams stated, that the meeting will be held on September 23, 2021 as advertised.

Jay Musleh out at 10:13 A.M.

Economic Impact Study & Visitor Tracking Report

Ms. Rachael Anglin, Downs & St. Germain stated, that this presentation would be the full year visitor tracking and economic impact report results. The study objectives have remained the same throughout the year, the first report will look similar to the quarterly reports walking through the visitor's journey. This includes the pre-trip, which is what brings the visitor to the destination, what the travel party size looks like, where they came from, trip experience, how long they were in the destination for, what accommodations they stayed at and post-trip travel surveys.

With the full year report, the data can be compared to the last reporting year of 2018-2019. There were several differences that were shown in this report, like more visitors used OcalaMarion.com to plan trips to the destination, and more visitors saw promotions or advertisements of the area. More visitors were traveling as a family, additionally more travelers were loyalists who have been to Ocala/Marion before. International visitors were significantly down due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Visitors in the destination did more outdoor adventures, like swimming/kayaking in the springs, hiking, biking and fishing.

Jay Musleh returned at 10:17 A.M.

Ms. Anglin continued, the results of the trip planning cycle showed that half of the visitors to the destination planned to visit a month or less in advance. The top trip planning sources used showed that two out of five visitors learned about the destination through friends and family, one out three were using search sites like Google. Social media played a large part in the visitor's research showing a 17% increase over the last reporting period. The top reasons for visiting the area showed that most came to visit

friends or family, and to watch equine events. Advertising played a big part in bringing visitors into the destination, with over half the visitors surveyed having seen ads on social media and/or print ads, and billboards. Most of the visitors surveyed that came to the destination are from Florida, however there were some visitors from outside of Florida and most were for the southeast region. International travel was way down, but that is due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Top markets for traveling to the destination showed that Orlando, Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, Tampa and Jacksonville had the most visitors coming to the destination. Nearly all visitors stated that the destination far exceeded their expectations and planned to return for another trip.

Jeff Gold out at 10:24 A.M.

Ms. Anglin continued into the economic impact of the study from July 2020 through June of 2021. The last study was conducted April of 2018 through March of 2019. The current research period brought it over \$1.09 billion, which is an 8% increase to the last year studied. Visitors to the county spent over 692 million dollars on their hotels, restaurants, and local attractions which was up significantly from the last reporting period, by 3.8%. Visitors generated a net benefit to Marion County Government over \$8.9 million via taxes and user fees. Tourism in Ocala/Marion County supported 11,722 local jobs, which was decrease from last reporting period by 1.8%, however over \$291 million was generated in wages and salaries which is up by 0.7%. An additional Ocala/Marion County job is supported by every 163 visitors. Visitors to the destination saved local residents \$527 per household every year using state and local taxes. Visitors to the destination generated 1,140,700 room nights in paid accommodations which generated \$3,232,101 in TDT collected, which is an increase of 12.1%. Partner involvement and event participation allowed for the study to be conducted. Over 2,093 interviews were completed with visitors to the destination.

Mr. White commented, that the research was great and that he would like to have a copy of the report that was presented. Ms. Sky Wheeler, Tourism Manager, stated, that the research would be on the Ocala/Marion website now that it had been presented to the TDC.

Jeff Gold returned at 10:27 A.M.

Staff Updates

Ms. Shaffer stated, that Jessica Heller would be presenting her report on Public Relations and Social Media for the third quarter of 2021. Ms. Heller did receive an award at Florida Outdoor Writers Association for the Ocala/Marion Adventure Pass.

Public Relations and Social Media/Website Analytics Report

Jessica Heller, Marketing and Communications Coordinator, stated, the report will cover public relations, social media and the analytics of the Ocala/Marion Website. The first portion of the report will cover public relations, showing that equestrian news and equestrian events were the top performers. The report also shows nationally and internationally where Ocala/Marion is being talked about for this quarter. Marketing efforts for this quarter have been focused domestically. In addition to the press release distribution, the VCB hosted 3 separate press trips during this quarter as part of the VCB's continuing PR efforts. The first trip was with five journalists in partnership with Visit Florida, the goal of the trip was to highlight socially distant activities in Florida's great outdoors. The coverage that resulted from the trip is included in the report. The second press trip was Multicultural Maven, a Latino parenting and lifestyle travel blogger. She brought her family of four and a professional photographer, and her blog post is also included in the report, as well as some of the posts she made while she was in the destination. The last press trip was another opportunity with Visit Florida. It was the first international FAM that was hosted since the pandemic. The two media members were from Mexico working on behalf of one of the larger editorial groups with multiple brands. There are no articles published yet during this quarter, but included in the report are multiple social media posts from the time they were in the destination as well as after. There was a bit more local coverage than the VCB usually gets with the press release sent out about bringing the record tourism tax revenue, snippets of those articles are also in the report. The list for all the earned media for this quarter totals in media value over \$140K, with a combined reach of more than 15 million.

Jeff Gold out 10:37 A.M.

Ms. Heller continued, the social media portion of the report covers the analytics and reporting for social media for this quarter. This data will compare to the previous quarter which was January through March. The VCB has an active daily presence on social media with Facebook, Instagram and Twitter being the main focus. Overall compared to the previous quarter, audience growth is continuing to increase both with impressions and postings. Social media behavior is constantly changing based on seasons, event topics, topics of interest and more. It could be the difference between one incredibly popular post that shifts the numbers higher in one quarter, which would maybe make one quarter lower than the next. While engagements were slightly down 12.5%, impressions were up 18.3%. Total for all platforms, the VCB had 4.4 million impressions, 142K engagements and almost 18K post-link clicks. Instagram impressions increased 38% with total engagements around 22K. The top Instagram post had over 1,600 likes and was a user generated picture of a sunset on the Rainbow River. For Facebook this quarter, impressions increased 14% with 119K engagements. Organic impressions accounted for about 28% of the amount. The top organic Facebook post had a total of 514 likes, almost 2,200 engagements, which was also a user generated picture of a Glass Bottom Boat at

Silver Springs State Park. For Twitter, impressions increased about 3.6%, with 53K impressions, engagements decreased just slightly, the top tweet was also a user generated tweet about Silver Glen Springs.

Ms. Heller continued, for the savings pass's that the VCB partners with Bandwango and both passes are available free of charge to visitors. One of the passes encompasses all of the outdoor activities in the destination, while the other pass encompasses the destination itself. The number of users that signed up and/or redeemed the pass during the quarter was 101 visitors, with most of the signups happening in June.

An overview of the website performance will compare to April through June of 2020. For this period higher traffic volume to the website happened between 8:00 AM-10:00 PM. The total number of visitors to our website during the quarter was 185K, which was a 13% increase to last year. The VCB writes blogs that are relevant to the destination which get shared on social media, driving traffic the Ocala/Marion website. Two new blogs were written with baseball in mind, one that focused on planning some fun off the field, and a blog specific to summertime events. In addition to the blogs, the top visited pages were the home page, the event page, things to do outdoors page, and the dining and nightlife page. The majority of the visitors to the website are from organic traffic at 56%. This quarter had a 128% increase in visitation to the website through organic search.

Jay Musleh out 10:45 A.M.

Jeff Gold back at 10:45 A.M.

Ms. Heller continued, the partner pages had more than 900 directory listings for the website, these are continually updated with new partners and events on a regular basis. This quarter had a 124% increase compared to last year in website acquisitions with partner pages. This shows that when a visitor visits the website, the first thing they are looking at are the partner pages. There were over 20K clicks for the partner pages. Ms. Heller than noted, that all of this information was included in the report.

Gateway Signage Update

Ms. Shaffer stated, that there would be a quick video showing the I-75 Interchange at NW 49 Street. Tracy Straub, Assistant County Administrator, stated, during the course of the study for the interchange, and interchange designs, the county moved into a diverging diamond interchange. This is a unique design that hasn't been seen a lot with there being one in Vero Beach and one in Sarasota, FL. They are used much more frequently farther north, outside of Florida. The interchange itself will be coming off of 44th Ave which is the road that runs on the West side of I-75, coming from the southwest side, where there will be an orientation and the flyover, the graphic that will be shown

doesn't adequately show all of that. The unique characteristic of the diverging diamond is the traffic pattern, which is crossing over on opposite sides than normally driven on, which allows for a smoother transition onto the interstate. The video allows for the operation to be seen. The website linked to the document in the agenda packet is a summary from DOT. The link listed cflroads.com brings up all the counties that are in our DOT district, click on Marion County and all the statuses of various projects that DOT is working on along with updates as the process moves forward. Construction is supposed to begin in 2024-2025 on this particular interchange. The construction itself is estimated at well over \$40 million, the overall cost is approaching \$60 million with land acquisitions along with the design itself.

Mr. Bailey clarified, the location has not changed, just the way the interchange is designed. Ms. Straub stated, that was correct. The county is anticipating getting bids in the next few weeks for the next stretch of construction.

TDT Collections/STR and Key Data Update

Ms. Wheeler stated, that for the collections, the reporting period of July, which covered June revenues, collections totaled \$379,652.81, which was up \$137,151.62 or up 56.56% year over year. 17.63% of the collections were from late taxes and penalties. For the STR data, occupancy was at 68.9% this year, which was up 18.2% year over year, ADR was at \$96.55, which was up 31.7% from last year, RevPAR was at \$66.54, which was up 55.7% from last year. For the running 12 months, occupancy was up 9.5%, ADR was up 7.3% and RevPAR was up 17.5%. Visit Florida as a whole for their July STR. showed that occupancy statewide was at 75.1% (up 73.3%); ADR was \$172.38 (up 45.1%) and RevPAR was at \$129.43 (up 151.4%).

Ms. Wheeler continued, for Key Data, ADR was at \$139, which was an increase of \$65 from last year. RevPAR was at \$44, which was an increase of \$4 from last year, occupancy was at 31.3%, which was a decrease of 43.5% from last year. For the running 12 months, occupancy was down 16.79%, ADR was up 159.46% and RevPAR was up 117.07%.

Sales Update

Mr. Corry Locke, Group Sales Supervisor stated, that the VCB has been working with the Ocala Lacrosse Club, who want to have a tournament in January 2022. A couple of locations have been looked at, as the tournament would require a minimum number of fields. The planner is estimating to have about 200 room nights. One of the ongoing leads is a GBL Basketball Tournament in December 2022 and is estimated 1000 room nights. Mr. Locke stated, that he would be attending two conferences, Connect Sports Marketplace and the Governor's Conference on Tourism.

Ms. Shaffer added, that she would be unable to attend the Governor's Conference

because she and Commissioner Gold will be in Asheville with a joint event with the Chamber of Economic Partnership, but Jessica and Corry will be representing the VCB in her absence.

Notation for Record

Mr. Adams noted, the TDC attendance report and the revised Economic Impact Study and Visitor Tracking Report were noted for the record.

Old Business

Mr. Adams called for any old business to be discussed, nothing was brought forth.

New Business

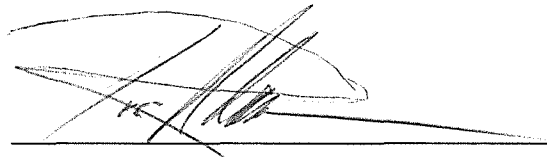
Mr. Adams called for any new business to be discussed, nothing was brought forth.

Public Comment

Mr. Adams called for any public comment. Ms. Wheeler stated that if anyone on the WebEx call would like to make comment they now had the ability to do so. No comments were made.

Mr. Adams stated, the next TDC meeting would be on September 23, 2021 at 10:00 A.M.

Meeting adjourned at 11:01 A.M.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rus Adams', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized with several overlapping loops and strokes.

Rus Adams, Chairman